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ABSTRACT

This second volume of stories written by teachers concerns the individuality of children, and classrooms in which every member, including the teacher, is an integral part of a dynamic whole. Each story has a different perspective. The first story describes inclusionary strategies used with a particular child. The second examines curriculum adaptation. The third focuses on integration in the context of the change process. The fourth describes the changing role of a school's resource room. The fifth, sixth, and seventh stories demonstrate, in different ways, how classrooms rich in literature experiences can captivate and empower all students. (GLR)

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REACHING ALL THE CHILDREN

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REACHING ALL THE CHILDREN

A Second Book of Stories from the Classroom

New Brunswick
Department of Education
Student Services Branch

ISBN #1-55048-360-9

Fredericton, N. B.
March 1991

MORE STORIES FROM THE CLASSROOM

Welcome to this second volume about teaching all children. As in the previous book, the teacher-authors approach the subject from a variety of perspectives. J. E. LeBlanc-Haley and Helen Ward take a close-up look at curriculum adaptation, focusing on a particular lesson; Elizabeth Bowes, Ann Kelly and Beatrice Crossman describe their inclusionary strategies for a particular child; Pat Winchester looks at integration in the context of the change process, while Bruce McMillan, Bill Smith and Maurice Dion describe the changing role of their school's resource room. Margo MacDonald, Carol Ward and Mary Mesheau demonstrate in different ways – but with similar conviction– how classrooms rich in experiences with literature can captivate and empower all students.

These stories are about children in all their interesting individuality and classes where every member, including the teacher, is an integral part of a dynamic whole.

Thanks to each of these authors and to the children whose eloquent writing is quoted here. Thanks, too, to Mike Mesheau, whose illustration for Mary Mesheau's story graces the cover of this book.

Midge Leavitt, Editor

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JONATHAN

Jonathan is a nine-year-old boy who came to us from Sunny Corner in grade two. He entered Ann Kelly's class with a full time aide – Beatrice Crossman. I must add here that having a special needs student was a new experience, not only for Beatrice, Ann and myself, but for the entire school, too, and, furthermore, that it was a positive one and beneficial to all.

Jonathan's progress has been closely monitored for several years, with IEP's having been in place. From his records it looks as though all agencies have co-operated to see that he has received the best care possible, the most recent change having been his integration into the classroom. Several meetings were held throughout the year to discuss and evaluate his progress.

Jonathan has many needs, the greatest one being his need to be able to communicate. His receptive language is fairly good and he is able to understand and carry out simple commands, but he has problems with expressive language. Although he is able to make many sounds, there are only a few that he can imitate consistently. He has to be highly motivated before he gives a correct response on the first try. For example, he wasn't too long in making the "p" sound when the school secretary showed him a bottle of pop. I've found, too, that asking Jonathan for sounds in a teacher-student situation is not as effective as asking for responses in a less structured environment. It has to be spontaneous.

We also use signs in the hope that he will learn to say the corresponding words. He is learning some words this way but often does not use them in context. For example, he may give the sign for book and even say "boo" but will then go to the toys. He does know, though, that by signing he gets a change of scenery. Whatever way one looks at it, he is communicating, and through gesturing and vocalizing he is able to get his message across.

Jonathan also has many physical needs. Having cerebral palsy affects his balance and his muscles. It is in this area, however, that most progress has been made. He has become more active and lively; he can, for example, walk upstairs with alternating steps rather than one step at a time. Although he would probably not have initiated the transition himself, once shown how to do it, he has continued without prompting. He was also learning to run while in the gym. Unfortunately, a fall at home, resulting in a broken ankle, has hindered his progress in this area, but he is making a good recovery – a much faster one than we had expected.

Jonathan's schedule allows him to be in the classroom most of the day. He leaves for 45 minutes each morning, during which time he visits the Methods & Resource room to work on the communication skills described earlier. Two physical education periods take place at this time, so I take him to the gym where I physically assist him to participate in most activities with his peers. One of our objectives in the gym is for Jonathan just to stay with the group rather than wandering off. His classmates are wonderful in this respect, as they look out for him. One little girl in particular is like an old mother hen and sometimes I have to tell her to allow him to try things on his own first.

Jonathan takes part in opening exercises. He bows his head for the prayer, although his teacher tells me that when she opens her eyes to check the class, she finds Jonathan peeking back at her. He is expected to sit quietly and listen during story time, sometimes requiring prompting to do so.

While the class is doing oral or guided reading, Beatrice reads the same material quietly to Jonathan, and if the students have been assigned seatwork or the teacher is at the board, he is provided with educational puzzles and games.

Jonathan has some classroom duties to perform, too. At drink time it's his job to turn on the tap for everyone. After he has had his drink he disposes of the teacher's cup as well as his own. Even though Jonathan usually has a hard time not touching everything he sees, he is able to carry out these tasks without getting distracted.

Lunch time gives Jonathan the opportunity to learn some self-help skills, such as picking up his tray and utensils in the cafeteria. It's also a time to interact with others. Ann tells me

that she could sell advance tickets for seats at Jonathan's table, he is so popular. Noon hour indoors provides time when he may be invited to join his classmates in play. Conversely, it's a time, too, when other children play with some of his things. Often, Beatrice will read a story to the whole group.

Jonathan attends French classes, where he completes exercises with help, and where every effort is made to include him in as much activity as possible.

He participates in SSW too. While he makes scribbles on his paper, Beatrice composes a piece of writing for him. She says she tries to tell it from his point of view. During sharing time Jonathan brings his story to the front and stands beside Ann while she reads it to the other children. He appears to be very attentive and proud.

I said at the beginning that Jonathan's coming to our school has had a positive influence on everyone. His teacher believes it instils in the children a tolerance and understanding of others who are different. The entire staff has become interested in his progress and enjoy interacting with him.

What may be insignificant gains for some may be monumental for others, and, while Jonathan's progress is slow, integration has been beneficial to him. He enjoys being with his classmates and appears to be a very happy child.

Elizabeth Bowes, Methods & Resource Teacher,
with Ann Kelly and Beatrice Crossman

A SAMPLE LESSON

Much research has been done on integrating students with special needs into the regular classroom. Increasingly, there is a need for descriptions of practical ways this ideal can be achieved in the classroom.

The following is a description of a science lesson (STEM BOOK 6) in a grade 6 class where there were children with varying abilities. In order to put the article in perspective the following needs to be stated.

1. The class was made up of twenty-six students, seven of whom had special needs ranging from developmental delays to learning disabilities. One student was emotionally troubled.

2. During the lesson a Methods & Resource teacher was present.

3. The Methods & Resource teacher and classroom teacher met on a regular basis in order to prepare lessons.

4. We also had access to another Methods & Resource teacher, who assisted with modifying curriculum and worked with two of the students at specific times during the day.

The science lesson dealt with the Classification of Living Things.

As a brief introduction and review of living and non-living things, words from each category were put on pieces of paper and magnetized to the board so the students could not see the words. These words all referred to items included in a large mural sketched on the board. Students were asked to come up and turn a word over and put it beside the object it referred to in the mural. The students who needed help were assisted by one of the teachers in reading the word and they then were able to put it in the correct place by themselves. The class as a group decided

what the two categories of words referred to and these were written on the other board (Living Things / Non-Living Things).

To reinforce the concept, the words were taken from the mural by students and put under the correct headings. Students with special needs could do this alone, as they knew the headings that were on the board and the picture was the clue for the words they selected. This preliminary activity took only about ten minutes and, besides serving as a review of classifying living and non-living things, it enabled students with special needs to participate as fully as possible from the very beginning of the lesson.

In order to further classify the idea of categorization, each student was given an envelope with triangles, circles, squares, and rectangles. These shapes were repeated in two different sizes and four different colors. The task for the students was to put the shapes in groups according to a common characteristic. The students did this independently.

When one way of classifying was completed, the students were asked to think of another way. More able students were asked to group the objects together in as many ways as possible and also to group them where there was more than one common characteristic per group.

The least able students were given assistance, only if needed, by one of the two teachers in the room.

When this was completed, students circulated, looking at how others had grouped the shapes. This gave a chance for all students to see how individual answers could be right and how everyone was successful.

Using their textbooks, students were asked to use the pictures of the animals on two designated pages and classify them in any way they wished. This was to be done in their notebooks. Students had to include a written statement explaining their groupings.

One student was given a photocopy of the textbook pages and asked to cut out the animals and paste them in according to the groups he designated. One of the teachers wrote the reason for the grouping beside the pictures.

Three of the students were given the words for the animals, as paper-and-pencil work slowed down their completion of the task and, for one student in particular, the actual writing of anything usually precipitated a crisis. Cutting out the words and pasting them in did not elicit such a reaction. One of the teachers assisted in writing the reasons for the students' groupings. Two students wrote this with assistance in spelling and for one student it was written by a teacher.

The reading of the textbook was done orally in small groups, with one person designated as the reader and another designated as the recorder. The teachers did not assist in this activity; other students in the groups helped students with special needs to find the correct page in their texts, even though the reading level was advanced and one student was a non-reader. The groups were required to answer one question after listening to the text. The recorder wrote the answer that the group agreed upon. When the large group was assembled, each group reported their answers and a discussion ensued. Additional questions emanating from the answers given and from the reading were asked by the teacher. The Methods & Resource teacher assisted students with special needs in formulating answers to questions. With this rehearsal, they felt more confident and would answer questions in front of the class.

During the independent writing of notes, the Methods & Resource teacher took any students we felt were experiencing difficulty, and reviewed the concept presented, either in a small group in the class or in the library.

Notes for students with special needs were previously written and photocopied in part or in total, depending on the student. At times, three of the students would finish one sentence of the notes themselves.

The class ended with a short film, *Animal Classification*.

During this lesson all students had a chance to participate throughout the class. Even though the requirements for individuals were not the same, the individuals functioned within the group and a group identity was, for the most part, maintained.

Not all the lessons for the class followed this format, nor were they always as successful. This particular unit did go well for all students and we were pleased with the outcomes.

As part of the unit, the students were all asked to complete a project on an animal of their choice. An outline for the report was put together by the class during a whole class lesson. The outline was then given to each student so that material on each topic could be found. The students were given index cards on which they could write the bare bones of their research. The completed index cards and the outline were then used in class so the students could write their reports. Some students were given a copy of the outline in sentence form. Their task was to fill in the words with the information about their animal. For example:

Appearance:

My animal is the _____. It belongs to the _____ family. It is covered with _____ and has _____ legs. It is about as big as _____.

Food:

The _____ eats _____ _____.

Some students needed to have the information for their reports read to them, others used resources at an easier reading level.

The cover for the title page was done by all students in art class.

When the students did the actual writing of the report in class time, those who needed a lot of oral assistance went to the library with one of the teachers and worked there. Most of the time the group included more than the students with special needs; other students, too, needed help with organizational skills, spelling, and reading the material.

The reports were all marked and displayed in the classroom.

Students with special needs were thus involved in whole-class activities, small-group work with their peers, individual work when others were also doing independent work, and special grouping for specific concept development. For the most part, we tried to accomplish this in the classroom, but there were times when removal from the large group was more beneficial.

This particular unit went well. As you can see, the necessary resources were available in terms of time and personnel. Not all our attempts went as smoothly as this particular unit.

We did find that using the co-operative learning approach with some of the activities assisted us in working with all students in the classroom.

We hope that this article has provided you with a concrete example of what can be accomplished, given the resources, time, and appropriate support personnel.

J. E. LeBlanc-Haley and Helen Ward

FROM THERE TO HERE

Our school system has undergone many changes throughout the years. To mention just a few: grouping in the classrooms, continuous progress, open classrooms, self-contained classes for students with special needs, team-teaching, resource rooms and "integration."

For each change, there has been a soul-searching process that those involved have engaged in. At the time, each appeared to be the right and proper thing to do. We felt at each stage that children would learn better and be happier in our public school systems.

Along came "integration." With it came disbelief that the children with severe handicaps could fit into our public systems; fear that we would be unable to do justice in teaching these students; fear that they would be a continual disturbance and prevent our regular students from learning what they should; fear that they would just be there, occupying space. "What do we do with them?" Sound familiar? All legitimate fears, of course!

Opening day, September 1987, in our Junior High School, we were expecting two children with severe developmental delays. They were to arrive in the school van. Buses began arriving and with them came our two special students. Due to a communication foul-up, they thought they were to travel by regular bus, so here they were. They've been travelling on the regular buses ever since.

Their homeroom teachers were at the door to meet them. Smiles of welcome were exchanged and then, off to class! Our teacher aide was on hand and proved to be a tremendous help because she had formerly worked with both students. The subject teachers and the Resource & Methods teachers set about getting to know these students and the various others with special problems.

At the end of six weeks we were ready to begin writing Individual Lesson Plans; and so it began.

Many of our fears never materialized. Some problems cropped up that we had not thought of. It was a learning experience for all of us!

One of the students, who is non-verbal, missed the bus after school. The family had moved about a week previously and had not as yet given us their new phone number. Panic! This child could not give directions to her new home. We didn't have a phone number so that we could call and ask for directions.

The driver of the school van happened along and said that the student might be able to give him some directions. Off they went! Sure enough, she could point to the left or right and eventually got herself home. No one was more surprised than those who had been working with her. We definitely had to do a re-evaluation of this child's capabilities.

We did not have a speech therapist or a psychologist on staff in the District. We still do not have them. If we had waited until we had all the services available, we would still be at the Resource Room stage.

There are still a number of problems to be solved, and there will always be problems of one kind or another. Doubtless, things will never be exactly as we want them.

If you really want to assess Integration, talk to some of the former CACL students and ask them how they feel about being in their community schools with other students their own age. Ask the regular students if they feel that their education is being neglected for these other students. Ask how they feel towards the students with handicaps.

Not all of the comments will be positive, but there will be more positive ones than negative. After all, isn't that what it's all about?

It's been a long way from there to here.

Pat Winchester

A DIFFERENT APPROACH TO THE RESOURCE ROOM OPERATION AT SUGARLOAF SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Stereotyping in education is the most difficult concept to overcome. This practice suggests that problems are solved by placing them into neat little groups to correct the educational woes of students with adjustment difficulties at school. We as educators deal with students, not objects, and therefore the solutions are as varied as the number of students served by the resource staff. Individual needs must be assessed and administered to. Students are complicated and cannot be classified into simple categories or pass through the same mould – a bureaucrat's solution. The belief that rigid standards will improve the individual needs of students is, according to our philosophy, unjust to the student and to the educational system.

Concepts of education have had to change; so also does the thinking process of schools. Society will no longer accept a system that dooms certain members of its school population to failure. Therefore, the guiding principle should be that every child can learn and has a right to an education. The student's ability and desire should be the only limitations. Limitations should not be arbitrarily placed on students, rather, the students should be given all the help they need in order to reach their own personal goals. To accomplish this, a resource support unit must be made available for all students to use as the need arises.

People need to know that they are important and that someone cares about their existence. All students require the same reassurance. Each needs to know that he or she is important as an individual. The resource room at Sugarloaf Senior High works towards this goal for our students. It is staffed by two full-time and one half-time resource teachers and three teacher aides. To facilitate this philosophy the resource room has adapted the look and operations of a "drop-in" centre before school, during breaks, at lunch and after school. The resource room is a popular spot. Initially, it was an area that gave support to students with special needs who had been integrated in the school. Today, however, it is more. All students drop in because of the friendly atmosphere which permeates the place, and the many activities

that go on, making it a more attractive place to "hang out" than the halls. Activities include crafts, construction projects, interesting science projects and conversation, all of which help to create a relaxed, enticing, and friendly atmosphere to facilitate sharing, learning and socialization.

Students in this environment are relaxed and accepting of the needs of others. It is not uncommon to find students in the resource room helping others whose needs are greater. As a result, most students are drawn back to the resource room to experience again the intrinsic rewards of helping others by sharing information or learning. It is not only the integrated students who benefit from extra help, but all students willing to utilize the resource room. This year there has been a dramatic increase in the number of "walk-ins." The effect of regular students on the integrated students is notable. This has created a better understanding by regular students of integrated students who have come into Room 212 for help in both the affective and cognitive domains.

Students are given the feeling of belonging. They know that a group of determined people do care. The aides spend time at breaks and at noon playing games, help all students to catch up with homework, listen to the latest gossip or help get notes and binders in order.

The thought of success, at times, is elusive when you are involved in the everyday occurrences. Often it becomes entangled in the procedures of the work place. However, if the beliefs are well grounded in the daily practice, then success in helping the students with their individual needs can be achieved. The partnership of students, resource staff and teachers – based on a working trust – help us to meet students' individual needs in a holistic approach. Our unit is open to *all* students who wish to utilize the resources available to advance in their personal development, socially and educationally. To fully comprehend and appreciate the process of helping to meet individual needs of our students, you really must experience it. Come visit the resource room at Sugarloaf High School.

Bruce McMillan, Bill Smith,
May Firth and Maurice Dion

THE IRON MAN IN THE CLASSROOM:
A Study of Children's Potential to Appreciate and Respond to Literature

Last year I was fortunate enough to obtain a sabbatical leave in order to pursue a Master's Degree in Education. Course work and reading in such areas as literary theory, developmental drama, children's literature and curriculum theory led me to an inspiring yet practical independent study.

This study entailed critical enquiry into children's response to literature at two levels – grades two and five, with additional input from grades one and six. I worked with two classes in Lincoln Elementary School for a two-week period in a reading and writing experience dealing with one piece of imaginative literature – *The Iron Man* by Ted Hughes.

My theoretical perspective lay in a firm belief that a child's potential to appreciate and respond to literature is not realized with a basal reader, and that the literature must be placed in the centre of the curriculum with all the other "language arts" developed from and through it.

My study was a practical exploration of recent research dealing with relationships between the text and the reader, the reader and other readers, and the reader and teacher as facilitator of the process. The book was read to the children in segments; responses were taped during the reading of each segment, after each segment, during drama and at the end of the reading. The students were encouraged to speak and write predictions and responses, were involved in drama and role-play throughout, doodled responses as I read, and created some major art projects throughout the two weeks.

The inclusion of drama in this study enabled the children to move away from the more concrete details of the story into the realm of their own imaginations as well as their collective imaginations. Seven-year-old children instantly took on roles – as farmers intent on saving their farm machinery from an iron eater or as

politicians intent on saving the world from a Space-Bat-Angel-Dragon. They became completely engaged in the action of the story through their own (and others') imaginative awareness.

Children involved in drama as it relates to literature are able to experiment with a variety of social roles. In one part of the book, a hungry Iron Man eats the machinery of a farming community. I became the Mayor and, with one brief statement (tinged with panic) from a leader, the children, despite their earlier pity for a disassembled Iron Man, became extremely agitated in their very practical social role.

When the Iron Man was an object of pity, most responded with their own identity themes – for they, too, had felt loneliness and fear. As a brotherhood of farmers, however, they became influenced by the social character of any group and the "drama" of it all carried them away. Moral issues were explored and the sensitive nature of some children was epitomized in one seven-year-old's yelling at another (who wanted to call in the army), "But not like that! That could kill him and he never killed anyone! He ate and hurt *things*, not people. He's just like people!"

When grade five students predicted a burial of sorts for this "metal menace" (as they had dubbed him at this point), a small girl exclaimed with feeling, "Yes, but we don't even bury people that do wrong – we don't even bury murderers, we just put them in jail. Burying is worse – it's terrible!" And the voice of a sensitive and shy child who felt they should leave the Iron Man alone for "He only ate our metal. In essence, he just got hungry. When we're hungry, we get crabby, too."

The fives learned the hard way that world leaders have to forget their own differences in order to overcome a greater threat. Unlike the twos, the fives did not elect an official spokesperson, and their collaborative in-role decision-making turned into a shouting match. Every prime minister and president thought their own idea about how to deal with a Space-Bat-Angel-Dragon was the best and only idea. In the meantime, the ordinary citizens stood by in frustration after being reminded of their status as the "people" – ordinary citizens cannot just walk into a summit conference and voice their opinions.

Grade five leaders finally voted to allow individual citizens to speak, for it was very apparent to them they were getting nowhere

on their own. I loved this, for the children were actually experiencing the political and social implications of the concept of democracy. (They also proved they could do it better than adults!) They were so totally immersed in their roles that when citizen Jim yelled to the prime minister of Australia to call in "He-Man," the prime minister turned to him with an absolutely scathing look and said, "Oh, come on, he isn't even real – he doesn't exist."

The Iron Man and the Space-Bat-Angel-Dragon *were* real to them at this point; they were totally implicated readers who wished to "milk the book dry" of all that it had to offer them as participants in *The Iron Man*. Within the drama, Hughes' reality was also theirs – proven so aptly by the statement pertaining to poor, *unreal* "He-Man."

In both groups, drama offered a means for all children to understand problems and concerns. They didn't always agree with solutions offered through the drama but, because they were all tuned into the same imaginative channels, they could understand each other in a way not always possible through conferencing or dialogue. Drama also enabled the children to absorb and assimilate the emotions that Ted Hughes' language elicited and then communicate these emotions.

The effect of the drama in this study was reciprocal – the children could not have become as involved in the drama if they were not wholly absorbed in the literature. Our drama enhanced my belief that drama and literature must be interwoven in our long-term aim of helping the child understand himself and the world he lives in. Dorothy Heathcote insists drama be used in the learning process to "bring out what the children know, but don't yet know they know." She calls this building volume within the students.

Within discussions and drama about the moral and social implications of Ted Hughes' story, the children were able to touch base with their own feelings in a community of readers and role-players experiencing the story of *The Iron Man*. All the children – the struggling readers, the shy and the precocious, and the children labelled as "disabled," in one way or another, became imaginatively and intellectually involved in the drama. Grade two students became physically involved as well – they spontaneously flapped their arms in the rhythm of Hughes' language as the Space-Bat-Angel-Dragon flew to the fires of the sun and back to

earth and they hymned their version of the peaceful music of the spheres at the end – softly and quietly.

When asked if they thought the earth might ever become as peaceful as the ending of the book, one seven-year-old replied, "It might, if only the angels would sing at night." A grade five student hoped that peace on earth could be achieved if all the nations could get together; then, "Maybe one day this would happen and all the murderers and cheaters and robbers and bad people like Alan Legere would all be good."

Drama in literature enables *all* our children to explore both inner and outer realities. It also enables the teacher to understand where the child is, in order to help with where he is going. At the end of the study, the two and fives came together as a community of readers and writers who had shared a literary event and were anxious to discuss it with one another.

One ten-year-old, in a discussion of the age groups that would enjoy this book, summarized the feelings of our community of readers with, "Anyone would enjoy it ... just you reading it to us ... I know my grandmother, she's fifty-three, and I know she'd enjoy it. It's using your imagination and using your brain." In this, she also capsulized what school should be about. *The Iron Man* was just one book. We must fill our classrooms with much more of the same if we are to satiate both the imagination and the brain of *all* the children in our classrooms.

Carol Ward

READING, THINKING, WRITING, AND LEARNING

What happens as children read? What are they thinking about? How do they feel about the plot, characters, mood, themes? Does the story remind them of anything that has happened to them in their lives or of other stories they may have read? In order to answer these questions, I needed to examine the kinds of questions I asked the students, questions that would allow and encourage them to respond to what they were reading. I refer to this talk about books as "literary discourse."

Besides reading to my grade four students each day, I give them lots of time to read, whether in pairs, groups, or independently. Instead of reading from a basal reader, they read and respond to literature. Students respond to their reading by talking and writing about their thoughts and feelings in a reading journal.

When I read to the children, I often stop to discuss vocabulary. Children are taught to use context clues and pictures to determine the meanings of new words. I also call attention to the author and illustrator of the book. Throughout the reading, students are asked to make predictions. Sometimes, I'll have them write their predictions in their journals, with reasons for their decisions. When the students are asked to tell about a certain character, they list words that best describe the person and then give examples from the story that support the description. For example: if a child suggested that a certain character was honest, determined, loyal, and caring, I would ask what the character said or did in the story that displayed these qualities.

Children are also attentive to illustrations, pauses, print, and other mechanics of writing that help them understand how the author created the story. Many other reading strategies are brought to the students' attention as I read to them, as well as suggestions of what they should be looking for as they read independently.

I encourage the students to ask themselves questions as they read and respond to literature. For example: Is there anything that confuses you – plot, language, vocabulary, character? Why do

you think the author used this particular technique here? What would you have done as a writer? What comes to mind as you are reading this book? What made you think of these experiences or memories? What are your reactions or feelings toward the book? What made you react a certain way? Can you predict what may happen? Why do you think that?

Using literature in our classroom has energized the students and me! The children are often making moral judgements and connections with the themes that are important to them. Many journal entries show that students feel as if they themselves were the characters, while at other times they seem to be standing back, looking in and evaluating what has taken place.

The reading of Eleanor Coerr's novel *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* invited the children to be actively engaged in a great deal of "literary discourse." Many of the students expressed their feeling about the effects of wars and the situation in the Persian Gulf. As well, students suggested that they should write letters or make Christmas cards for the men and women involved.

Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes is a true story of an eleven-year-old girl who developed leukaemia ten years after the dropping of the atom bomb in Hiroshima. The children's responses indicated that they were involved in the reading, made connections with real life experiences, and cared deeply about what had happened to Sadako. It is interesting to note the themes that appear to be important to different children and the various judgements and evaluations that they made.

"Literary discourse" involves shifting the types of questions we ask, so that children can think, interpret, and respond to the text.

Students' Responses

– I felt sad when Sadako died or you could say that she went into a deep sleep forever. I almost cried. I was so sad! Then when you read the end when the people were helping Sadako's parents to bury her and make the rest of the paper cranes, I was happy again. I sort of knew she was going to die when she would not eat when her mother brought her favourite food to the hospital!

– I really liked this book because it shows how anyone can be determined at any place and any time. I really think it had mixed feelings. Like happiness: when she got to visit home when she was sick, and sadness: when she died. She reminded me of my grandfather. He wouldn't let death conquer him. He had to take millions of kinds of pills. He could stop taking the pills and he would die but he kept on taking them. Later on he died but not till he had to.

– I think *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* was a sad story because Sadako died. I also think it is a story of true friendship because Sadako's friends tried to cheer up Sadako when she was down in the dumps. I can relate to this story because when my aunt was sick in the hospital. We tried to cheer her up as Sadako's family tried to cheer her up.

– I think that this story is very sad. I cried. I wish that nobody could get diseases, but people can't always help that. I *really* want to read this book because I love true stories. I watched a show before about the same disease. It was really sad. To see those children suffering with pain, and fear of dying. It would be lonely, too. I love true stories because I like learning about other people. I was not embarrassed when I cried because I believe in expressing my feelings.

– The people wanted to remember her and that's why they made a statue about her. She was special and people never wanted to erase her bravery from their memory. She did not want to give up in making the cranes. She believed in the cranes and never stopped until she could not make anymore. I hope her family doesn't get the disease too!

– I liked the book except for the end. Eleanor Coerr stopped when she died but I think that she should have told us how her family acted toward her death and where they buried her. I think that it was kind of her classmates to make the rest of the cranes so they could bury them with her. It was also kind of the classmates to collect money to make a sculpture of her.

I'm sure the immediate response that most teachers would have after reading these particular journal entries would be: "What else would you expect from the top students? I'd sure like to see how this type of an approach would work with students who struggle. What about the ones who need assistance from the resource teacher?"

Believe it or not, only three of the above responses to *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* were made by students whom many would refer to as *top* students. I discovered that all students need to share learning in a common environment. I couldn't imagine students missing out on all the wonderful discussions that went on in the classroom, to be cheated out of the fun of learning. Here was the perfect opportunity for those who were finding reading difficult to discover new strategies that could help them "turn onto reading and writing." It was quite obvious that phonics exercises and workbook pages would not bring reading alive to them. How much time do our students spend reading?

Many students have problems, some of which we cannot solve. I have a fond memory of one particular student who remained with me when I moved from fourth to fifth grade. Although she wasn't the only student with poor self-esteem, little self-confidence, and learning difficulties, I feel that she made the most dramatic improvement over the year. I soon discovered that she loved to listen to stories. In fact, there wasn't a day that went by that she didn't contribute to book talks. I guess you might say that the class environment was the one for her. What this child needed was an atmosphere that would help her build up self-esteem and confidence. Throughout the year, I continued to lead her to concentrate on what she heard during the reading. It wasn't long before she could tell how the author made pictures in her mind. She soon learned that what she saw and heard were sensory impressions.

As I read to the class each morning, I would always take time to talk about the books and how the author used certain techniques in his or her writing. We also discussed some skills and strategies that would help us in our reading. The key difference was that I used literature and taught in context rather than in isolation. It wasn't long before the students learned how to use these strategies and applied them when they read with a partner and/or independently. It was evident that they were enjoying what they were reading and wanted to read more.

Picture books were a great help! I taught the students how to look for visual signs that would help them in understanding the story. We often talked about the pictures – what they liked and didn't like about them, how they made them feel, and whether the colour or black and white was effective, and in what way.

As we read books, we talked not only about how the characters felt, but also about situations that we might have experienced ourselves. Children often identified with many of the characters in the books that they read. They had experienced many of the same problems – loneliness, fear, grief.

Following a week of fairy tale readings, the students were able to see common themes, characters, settings and story structures. They were eager to write their own tales. It was exciting to see how students took parts of fairy tales to incorporate into their own writing.

This did not happen overnight. I had to model and draw attention to certain techniques authors use in their writing. But what better way than with real literature? We were sharing ideas and learning in a co-operative way.

Reading must be meaningful to the reader. Not all children will enjoy the same literature. Therefore, it wasn't unusual to see children reading individual books as well as a common novel. If I wanted to draw their attention to descriptive verbs, I would ask them to find action words in the books they were reading. I would list some of the words on the board as a student read aloud a passage, so that each student became familiar with other students' texts. We would talk about context clues and how they help us discover the meaning of the words.

If children are reading books that interest them, they have a greater opportunity to feel like part of the whole class. They no longer have to feel left out. They can contribute to book talks, do the activities based on their reading and share ideas with all the other students in the class. All the children can tell about a favourite part, write a letter to the author, tell about a dream that the main character may have had or write a new ending for their story without having to read the same book.

I have included three pieces of work from the student I was referring to earlier. The first example is from her personal journal from last year. Aside from the mechanics of writing, it is interesting to note her train of thought. She certainly had difficulty writing about one idea.

I went to the store yesterday. I watched t.v. yesterday night, My mother said to take out the garbage. My dad helps me do my home work. I have a pet named tiger. My mom is very nice. I love my mom very much. I like Michael Jones.

The second example is a Halloween story that was written following a reading and discussion of *The Ghost Eye Tree*, by Bill Martin Jr. Her progress amazed me!

Bloody Halloween

One Halloween I went to the graveyard. I saw coffins with dead people in them. I started running really fast. I was really scared. I heard sounds. I screamed so loud that I thought I would wake up the dead but I didn't. I walked further and I saw an old man with shorts and a T-shirt on. I walked on the other side of him I seen maggots eating him alive. It was windy and foggy that night. I felt dead people beating underground saying help me I need to get my babies and kill them so I can come alive. I was so scared someone came behind me and tapped my shoulder. I jumped with fright. It was the man with the shorts and the T-shirt on. I thought he was dead. I screamed and man he chased me all through the graveyard. I thought that time when I screamed I woke the dead. Everybody was chasing me. When I was running I went by trees and each time I did I seen dead people hanging. I seen blood dripping from there mouths and spiders crawling all over them. I screamed so loud that the ghost people got even noisier. I fell over a rock I screamed and they all went back in there coffins. I was so glad to get rid of the ghost people. That night when I went home I told my mom dead ghosts were chasing me but she didn't believe me ... The other night me and my mom went up to the graveyard and we seen ghosts. They were all over the place and they were looking at us so we ran. When we got home my mom said never will I or you go up to the graveyard again. I wouldn't if I were you. Boo! I wouldn't dare.

The third example is an excerpt from a letter she wrote last June.

I feel proud of myself as a reader and writer because I have learned more. I can read chapter books and different kinds of books. I read picture books and chapter books. When I read chapter books, I can think up a picture in my mind. I've read more this year than ever before because my teacher got me into

reading. In grade five, I am going to tell my new teacher that when I was in Ms. MacDonald's class in grade four, she taught me how easy it is to read a book. She has taught me how to enjoy reading. I use to think reading was the pits. In grade five I am going to still read all kinds of books. Ms. MacDonald said that we could still use some of her books.

THANK YOU, Ms. MacDonald for getting me to read books this year because I wouldn't have done it without you. THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

I believe reading and writing have come alive for this student, and I am anxious to see what will happen in the following months, as we continue to read and talk about literature.

Margo MacDonald

A TRUE STORY FABULIZED

nce upon a time, not so very long ago, in the beautiful land of Pedagogy, there lived a wise, old (well, sort of old) woman named Pedagogue and her thirty-three children. They worked and played together in a quaint red brick castle. (Remember this is a fantasy.)

One day there came a knock on the door. When the door was opened, there stood the Great Wizard and a tiny little girl. She was all aglow with tinkling white lights. The Great Wizard announced: "Pedagogue, this is your new child, but you must remember that she is very SPECIAL!" And off he went to do more of the wonderful things Great Wizards do in the Land of Pedagogy.

"Come in, Little Special One, and join the others," said Pedagogue in her most welcoming voice. She brought the special little one to a small group that was working together. Each day the children and Pedagogue read stories together and alone, wrote stories together and alone and talked to each other about the work they were doing.

Then one day Pedagogue began to notice the tinkling brightness of the special little one was fading. She was not reading, writing, or talking with the other children.

Now this little girl's father worked as a wandering minstrel and he had come to the Land of Pedagogy to the School for Wandering Minstrels, so Pedagogue thought the little one might be sad about having left her friends to come to this new place. Pedagogue went to the little one and asked, "Is there something wrong?"

"Yes there is," answered the little one. "I'm special, you know. I can't read or write or talk like the other children. In the land where I came from I was given candies and stickers to help me do the things I was supposed to do. There was a special drawer

that was mine and when I did something good I could go to the drawer and get something special just for me."

Now Pedagogue was puzzled by this, as she only offered her children books to read, stories to share, paper to write and draw on and the time and space to do these things; so she said, "But, Special Little One, I don't have candies or stickers to give to anyone. Have you looked closely at the other children in this beautiful land of ours?"

The special little one raised her head and looked around. She saw what she had always seen, children reading to each other, writing in pairs or alone, sharing pictures in a book, or talking quietly, but as she looked she began to notice a tinkly brightness coming from each and every one of them.

"Are all these children special little ones who can't read or write too?" she asked.

"Well, they are all special little ones but they can read and write because they do it for themselves and for each other. You can read with lots of other people until you are ready to read to others and yourself. You can tell your stories until you are ready to write them yourself," answered Pedagogue.

The special little one sat in a corner while she thought about this. Her tinkly brightness was fading as she thought about how it used to be and how she knew she really couldn't be like the others, ever. But she was forced to notice how brightly the others seemed to shine as she was fading. She stood up and went to sit with a group that was sharing a story about an orphan girl with red hair and freckles. Her own tinkly brightness stopped fading, for she had red hair and freckles, too, and she began to listen to the talk around her. Each day she wanted to know more about this story girl who seemed so much like her. She began to talk to the others and read bits of the story herself. She wanted to write her own story to share with the others. Gradually her tinkly brightness returned and she never talked of stickers or candies again. She joined the community of readers and writers and they all lived happily ever after.

Mary Mesheau

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